DOCTORAL PROGRAM

IN

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY:

CONCENTRATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Virginia Commonwealth University

Fall 2017-18

Terri Sullivan, Ph.D.

Program Director
I. INTRODUCTION

General information on the program can be found in the Ph.D. in Psychology with a concentration in Developmental Psychology section of the VCU Graduate Bulletin. The Developmental Psychology Program at Virginia Commonwealth University fosters scholarship, teaching, and outreach to our community with the goal of understanding developmental processes across the lifespan. We emphasize research and applied skills in human development with a special emphasis on development in its social context. We prepare doctoral-level students for university or college teaching and research settings or for professional work in applied settings such as primary prevention, early intervention, or youth support.

A. Developmental Faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Faculty</th>
<th>Area of scholarship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Bargdill</td>
<td>Habitual/chronic experiences of boredom; cognitive/phenomenological model of habitual boredom and depression; phenomenological descriptions of meaningful events in the lives of undergraduates. Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative methods that uses narrative accounts to produce rich descriptions of human experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea Derlan</td>
<td>Positive development and well-being, particularly among African American and Latino youth; young children’s ethnic-racial identification; adolescents’ ethnic-racial identity; cultural socialization and the role of the family context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danielle Dick</td>
<td>Genetic and environmental influences on the development of alcohol problems and related disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wendy Kliewer</td>
<td>Social development of school-age children; stress and coping by children and parents; health behaviors; effects of violence on children; coping with illness and community violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fantasy Lozada</td>
<td>Social competence and emotional development among ethnic minority youth, particularly in middle childhood and adolescence; socialization processes in home, school, and Internet contexts; family cultural processes; race-related experiences as a context for child development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geri M. Lotze</td>
<td>Impact of disabilities throughout the lifespan, including healthcare service provision for children, violence prevention in adolescence, and stress and coping during emerging adulthood; children impacted by maternal incarceration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Area of scholarship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jessica Salvatore</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationships and substance use; gene-environment correlation and gene-environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zewelanji Serpell</td>
<td>Cognitive development of school-aged African American children; school-based interventions that target executive functioning; social and cultural contexts of learning; and school mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri Sullivan</td>
<td>Impact of peer victimization and witnessed violence on children’s social and emotional development; emotional and social competencies in adolescent development; school-based violence prevention program development and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia Winter</td>
<td>Child development in contexts of both acute and chronic stress; susceptibility and adaptation at individual, dyadic, and family group levels; parenting and family processes; biopsychosocial processes of child emotional and physical health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affiliate Faculty</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary affiliation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye Belgrave</td>
<td>Health psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalie Corona</td>
<td>Clinical psychology (child/adolescent concentration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey Gendron</td>
<td>Gerontology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce McLeod</td>
<td>Clinical psychology (child/adolescent concentration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Southam-Gerow</td>
<td>Clinical psychology (child/adolescent concentration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Treatment of childhood internalizing disorders, evaluation of treatment outcome in real-world settings, developmental psychopathology research related to emotion understanding and regulation.

E. Ayn Welleford
Primary affiliation: Gerontology
Chair of Gerontology
Successful aging, caregiver burden, coping with distress, adult mother-daughter relationships, and geriatric education.

B. Course Requirements

Students in Developmental Psychology must take the Department's core curriculum which has been designed to provide a solid foundation in psychology. In addition, students take required courses in Developmental and a number of elective courses in their specialty area.

For coursework requirements click here and scroll down to the Curriculum Requirements. Master requirements will be marked with a superscript 1.

C. Expectation for Activities Outside of Course Requirements

Throughout the graduate student career, students work closely with a faculty advisor. The student-faculty relationship is a mutually-chosen partnership; the partnership may change over time, as needed. Faculty are normally either core or affiliate Developmental faculty. If a student’s research advisor is not a core Developmental faculty member, the student should maintain an academic advisor who is a core member.

Part of the work conducted by students with their faculty involves designing, conducting, and writing up research. This work, of course, includes the thesis and dissertation. In addition, students usually work alongside the advisor on the faculty member's research program, learning each step of the research process and earning authorship on jointly-conducted presentations and papers.

Work with faculty mentors may also include the development of other skills such as infant, child, or adult assessment; program evaluation; new computer applications; or participation in an intervention or community program (for example, with infants, adolescents, persons with disabilities, or older adults).

Students are encouraged to seek a developmental practicum experience during the course of graduate training, especially if they plan to work as an applied developmentalist. Opportunities are sometimes available through special grant programs at the Partnership for People with Disabilities. Current students take part in the LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities) program, which provide interdisciplinary training and practicum experience.
Most students have the opportunity to teach laboratories or college classes and are guided and mentored in their first teaching responsibilities.

In semesters when a colloquium series is being held, students are expected to attend as many colloquia as possible and to be available to offer a colloquium.

Students are expected to submit their own research for publication and for presentation at conferences and, when possible, to attend relevant conferences and workshops.

All students are expected to become good researchers while in graduate school, but some students will want to add additional skills. Students should think through the kinds of careers they hope to have and to gain the skills and experiences that will help them get started in their field. Some students will want a traditional academic career, teaching and doing research in a college or university setting. Some may want to only teach, as in a 4-year college, or only do research, as in a laboratory or institute setting. Others may aim to gain applied skills and to work in an agency, a health care setting, or a community program. Some may want to add administrative experiences in preparation for working in a state or federal agency or serving as a consultant. These goals will be very individual and the plans for meeting them will differ from one student to another.

Students are formally evaluated by the core and affiliate Developmental faculty once each year. The advisor writes a letter to the student reviewing areas of strength and of problems. Students who are not making satisfactory progress may be put on probation or be asked to leave the program.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE

A. Master’s Degree Credits

For information on see the graduation requirements for all graduate students in the VCU Graduate Bulletin and the specific graduation requirements for the Health Psychology program in the VCU Graduate Bulletin. The former refers to the requirements and guidelines dictated by the VCU Graduate School and the latter are the department and program specific requirements. Students should pay careful attention to completing these requirements within the time limits allowed by the Department specified in the Graduate Student Handbook.

III. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE

A. Requesting Continuation

After completion of all M.S. requirements, students must submit a doctoral plan of study and formally request continuation in the doctoral program. Entry into the doctoral program is not automatic. For students who enter the graduate program with a master's degree, this request is made after the student finishes the core department curriculum, the three required Developmental courses, and at least three additional Developmental courses. The Developmental faculty consider the request at a meeting. After formal approval for continuation, students must pass a
written preliminary examination. Each student must take a minimum of 12 dissertation credits, a Social Psychology course (PSY 630 or another course), and any remaining Developmental or elective courses needed for the student’s specialty. The student must also form a dissertation committee, propose, conduct, and defend a dissertation.

Click here to learn about the VCU Graduate School’s policy on Degree Candidacy and click here and scroll to #4 to learn more about the policy for the developmental psychology program specifically.

B. Preliminary Examination

Prelims are taken after a student after a student has been formally approved for continuation in the doctoral program. Normally, prelims are taken before proposing the dissertation; they must be taken before the dissertation is defended.

The Preliminary Examination allows students to demonstrate their depth of knowledge and their ability to integrate information in Developmental psychology and in their specialty areas. A written preliminary examination must be passed for a student to become a doctoral candidate. The Developmental Division uses an open-book, take-home preliminary exam. Our purpose is to reduce the sometimes frantic and anxiety-provoking nature of the traditional closed-book, timed exam and also to encourage more thoughtful answers. An open-book procedure more closely resembles a real-life professional writing experience. This procedure is periodically evaluated to see that it is meeting our goals.

Students announce their intention to take prelims a semester before they will be taken, to allow time for preparation of a reading list and for study. The faculty advisor, along with the Division Director, provide assistance as the student studies. Lists of previous prelim questions are available to the students.

Students play a key role in preparing their own reading lists for the exam, especially in the specialty areas. Faculty will meet with students and provide guidance as well. Besides reading extensively, students are advised to write essays on their own to give practice in writing well-organized answers.

If the student fails the prelim, one opportunity will be given for retaking the exam. If the examination is failed a second time, the student will be terminated from the program.

These are the conditions of prelims in the Developmental Division, as adopted in April, 1993:

- The preliminary examination is given as a take-home exam.
- New questions are written for each student. Students taking the prelim at the same time may or may not have the same general questions.
- The exam is open-book and open-library. Students may ask clarifying questions of the faculty when they receive the questions to be sure they understand the question.
but should not have other conversations about the exam with faculty or students as they take the exam.

• Questions are required in the following areas: General Developmental, Research Methods, Social/Emotional Development, and Specialty Area(s). Answers will often “cut across” these traditional areas, however. Specialty Area questions comprise about half the exam.

• Questions require integration across areas of knowledge and require application of knowledge. Adequate knowledge and understanding of pertinent theories and empirical findings are a baseline expectation; creative and thoughtful answers are encouraged.

• Students have four days to write their answers. For example, they might receive the questions at 9:00 a.m. on Monday; answers would be due at 9:00 a.m. the following Friday.

• Page limits are specified for each answer.

• Answers must be typed. Pseudonyms are used when more than one student is answering the same question.

• Students and faculty work together to define individual specialty areas and to develop reading lists. They should begin this early enough to allow for thoughtful reading.

• The prelim exam will be given the week before the start of each semester, unless special circumstances suggest a change in that schedule.

• Each question will be graded by at least two faculty. Faculty outside Developmental may be brought in for grading.

C. Grading of Preliminary Examination

Each question is read and graded by two or more faculty. Each answer is scored as high pass, pass, low pass, or fail. Results of the grading will be discussed at a Developmental Division faculty meeting. The entire exam will be assigned a grade of Pass with Distinction, Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. Students who fail three content areas will fail the exam and must retake the entire exam. Students who fail one or two areas will receive a "conditional pass" and must remediate the failed content area(s). The nature of the remediation will be determined by the Developmental faculty. Students who receive high pass on all content areas, or pass on one content area and high pass on the remaining areas, will receive a "Pass with Distinction". Students will receive written notification of their prelim performance.